

FOIAb3b

VIET NAM QUEST

Brother Seeks Fallen Flier

SAIGON, Viet Nam (AP) — A dozen men leaped to their feet when Donald Charles Dawson walked into the U.S. Army aviators' mess hall at Bien Hoa Air Base.

"I'm not Dan. I'm his brother," said the tall look-alike of Lt. Dan Dawson, who had crashed in Communist jungle territory on a reconnaissance mission three weeks earlier.

Now, two months later, Dan Dawson's buddies know tall, red-haired Don, 25, as a determined inquisitor, quietly demanding to know every last detail of his brother's final hours with the unit.

They know him as a shy hitchhiker, riding the light Army spotter planes over the tangled jungles north of Bien Hoa where his brother is believed to have gone down.

Loads Leaflets on Plane

They know him as a persuasive loadmaster, stuffing leaflets offering a reward for his brother, dead or alive, into helicopters and fighter bombers to be unloaded high above the jungle.

They have seen him slip out of the base, his pockets stuffed with grenades and ammunition for his submachinegun, and catch the broken down country buses that ply the dangerous roads of the Viet Cong regions.

And they have seen him return weeks later, thin and exhausted.

Dan, 27, was a daredevil in the sky and fun to have around. But the brother who came looking for him is old beyond his years, friendly but tending to brood.

"All we had was a couple of



DONALD DAWSON

telegrams from the Defense Department," Don told a newsmen on a rare visit to Saigon. "One said he was missing, the other that an extensive search was being undertaken.

"But that was all. What really happened to him? Was he being dragged through Communist villages with a rope through his nose? Is he hanging in a tree somewhere? Is he alive and well? Is he dead?

"I must find out, that's what I came over here for. I must find out for myself, for Dan's wife and four kids (at Rohnert Park, Calif.) And for my brother."

Don, a captain of low-tonnage merchant ships, learned of his brother's disappearance last Nov. 13, a Friday, in Panama while he was taking three small ships from Oregon to Morgan City, La.

Don continued on to Louisi-

ana, then flew to his mother, Marguerite M. Dawson, in Costa Mesa, Calif. He decided to fly to Viet Nam and find out what had happened to his brother. But first he had to explain to his wife.

"She just couldn't understand why I would spend our savings on a project like this and choose my brother over her," he said.

"I told her I would be away just for a few months and that afterwards we would have our whole life together. I left her with \$20 and told her to find a job."

They have four young children.

He converted his money into Vietnamese piasters and offered a 100,000 piaster reward (about \$1,300) for his brother alive, 50,000 piasters for his body, 25,000 piasters for information about the crash and 35,000 piasters for debris from the airplane.

Official Efforts Small

Dawson haunted U.S. military authorities, learning that pitifully little was being done or could be done. Aerial photos were taken of the crash area, but no search parties had gone in because the region was too wild and dangerous.

Don made his way to a remote jungle village north of Bien Hoa and got a Catholic priest to carry his message whenever he moved out from the village into the surrounding jungle.

Within a week, he received word his brother was dead, killed in the crash, and buried beside the plane. He sought further information and one day

was summoned via the grapevine into the jungle.

But something happened and no one met Dawson. That was early in January. Later he learned the Viet Cong didn't trust him.

Wall of Secrecy

"They think I am a CIA agent or something," Dawson said. "I just have to convince them that I am out here to get him back, and that is the only reason. But it is hard to penetrate that wall of secrecy out there."

Dawson is still distributing leaflets and walking through the countryside, many times into areas where no other American has gone without troop escort.

He hopes the Viet Cong will bring his brother's body into the village church. But he is prepared to go anywhere they tell him to get it.

Dawson knows that one day he, too, may disappear in the jungles of Viet Nam.

"But that's a chance I'm prepared to take," he said.

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